



## The Amole Mining District

### Introduction

The Amole District was an unorganized Pima County mining district, of which 137 mining sites are within the Tucson Mountain District of Saguaro National Park

The Amole Mining District had small deposits of low grade ore although the only profit made there was from the sale of claims and not from mining.<sup>1</sup> Minerals sought in the district included copper, lead, silver, and molybdenum.

The National Park Service has determined that the Gould, Copper King/Mile Wide, Jewel, Arizona Copper Mining Company, and Old Yuma mines are individually eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance. The remaining mine features and the Amole Mining District as a whole at Saguaro National Park are considered not eligible.<sup>2</sup>

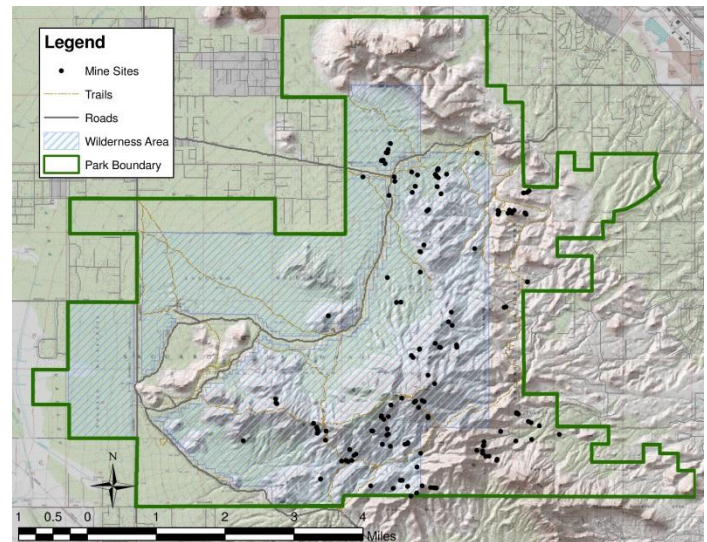
### Amole Mining District

Early references to the mining district call it the “Amolo,” “Amolio,” “Omolia,” others simply refer to the mining claims as being located in the *Sierra de Amole* or the Tucson Mountains without an association with any specific district.

Research has been unable to discern when the Amole Mining District was organized or whether it was done so formally. According to some sources, the district’s establishment coincides with the creation of the Old Yuma Mine, in 1877. However, the Amole Mining District preceded the Old Yuma by at least five years. Based upon the small number of claims in the area in the early 1870s—less than half a dozen—it is likely that the creation of the district was an informal affair.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, while the boundaries of the district are muddled, the current approximation of the district area has been ascertained by a sampling of mining claim location notices filed in the area over time.

The history of the Amole development paralleled the ebb and flow of mining activity in the other districts in southern Arizona. During the Spanish, Mexican, and early Anglo mineral exploration mining was centered



**Map of the Tucson Mountain District with mine sites indicated by black dots.**

farther south in Arizona and there is no extant evidence to indicate any such activity in the Tucson Mountains at that time. The Nequilla mine was the first mine located in the Amole District.

The Nequilla Mine was located on December 11, 1865 and is just southeast of the Saguaro National Park boundary. The claim was recorded by Jesus and Ramon Bustamente and Domingo Gallego on February 17, 1866.

On the federal mineral survey map of this claim, dated May 13, 1871, is a reference to the “Sierra de Amole Mining District.” Limited by the lack of a cadastral survey of this area, the mineral surveyor located the mining claim in reference to “Soap Weed Peak,” a currently unnamed summit on the northern edge of Tucson Mountain Park. Soap weed or soap plant is a type of agave that was used for the manufacturing of soap and was quite prolific in the area. The plant is commonly called by its Spanish name, “amole.”

Bustamente and Gallego’s interests in the mine were sold to James Lee and William Scott in 1867 and 1871. The mine was patented on September 28, 1872, making it the first patented mining claim in the Arizona Territory. Lee and Scott recovered silver ore until the early 1880s. The Nequilla Mine changed hands and was reworked a few times but closed for good in 1923 (Clemensen 1987:89-92).

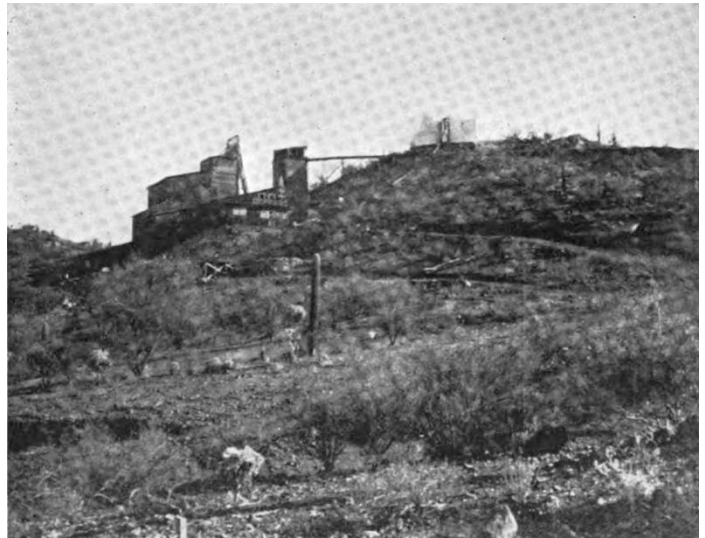
Registration of mining claims began to increase after 1872. The description of claim locations, however, is so

vague that it is impossible to locate most of them. Except for the Nequilla, few of the 1870s claims seemed to have had mining activity. Instead, they were mainly held for speculation.

There was no mining boom, just an evolution into a mining area that acquired the name Amole Mining District. The district had spikes in activity usually coinciding with rising metal prices and national booms, especially in copper mine speculation from the late 1890s to the Panic of 1907, and during the World War I era. However, these were imitative and low key speculations, nothing of the grand scale of the adjacent Twin Buttes or Silver Bell districts, and many others. There was no production phase, except minimally. The Arizona Bureau of Mines estimated a total production for the district of \$44,000 worth of metal by 1936, an embarrassingly low product, near the lowest of the mining districts in the state.<sup>4</sup>

During the 1880s metal prices increased and the Southern Pacific Railroad came to Tucson. Hoping to find silver, claims were patented in the 1880s for the Silver Moon, the Lola Lopez, the New Strike, and the Buena Vista. A claim on the Old Yuma Mine was filed in 1885 by Charles C. Stevens. The quest for silver was probably part of the post-Civil War interest in silver that dominated Arizona's mining economy between 1865 and 1893<sup>5</sup>. Not much silver has been produced in the Amole District. By the end of the nineteenth century, prospectors in the region began to take an interest in copper. A large number of claims were filed in the Amole District between 1897 and 1908. Most of the claims were filed by speculators. The Gould

Mine and Copper King/Mile Wide Mine had some limited success as copper mines. Even then, these two operations



**Old Yuma Mine and Mill, about 1920.**<sup>6</sup>

provided more excitement to area residents about mining potential than any mining or economic impact they may have had on the community. In the 1920s the president of the Mile Wide Copper Company absconded with the company's funds, creating the mining district's biggest scandal.<sup>1</sup> Operations at the Mile Wide Mine had ceased by 1943. The Gould Mine was worked until 1954. Efforts in 1959 to reopen the Gould Mine as an open pit mine failed.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A. Berle Clemensen, *Cattle, Copper, and Cactus: The History of Saguaro National Monument* (Denver: National Park Service, 1987),

<sup>2</sup> The Louis Berger Group Inc and Arizona Historical Research: Determination of Eligibility, Mining Features within the Amole Mining District, Saguaro National Park, Arizona. 2010

<sup>3</sup> *Tucson Citizen*, 26 March 1906.

<sup>4</sup> Morris J. Elsing and Robert E. S. Heineman, *Arizona Metal Production*, Arizona Bureau of Mines Bulletin 140 (Tucson: University of Arizona, 1936): 98.

<sup>5</sup> Keane, Melissa and A.G. Rogge, *Gold & Silver Mining in Arizona 1848-1945*, Arizona State Parks. Phoenix, Arizona, 1992.

<sup>6</sup> Olaf P. Jenkins and Eldred D. Wilson, *A Geological Reconnaissance of the Tucson and Amole Mountains*, University of Arizona Bulletin 106 (Tucson: Arizona Bureau of Mines, 1920)



**Gould Mine tailings and outbuilding along the Sendero-Esperanza Trail. View to west.**

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